

My uncle was murdered nearly 4 decades ago, but the suffering my family felt surmounts time. My family's homeland was ravaged and taken away from them, and my grandma did the best she could to protect her family. She immigrated to the United States as a single mother of three to give her children a better chance at life, and in 1983 that right was stolen from her youngest. Like many other immigrants, my family wasn't greedy— they didn't care to live extravagant or comfortable lives. They just wanted to survive.

The crime committed against my uncle Thong Hy Huynh was one fueled by anti-Asian discrimination and this is not up for debate. To refute this is to deny the ugly existence of racism that has pervaded through centuries of systemized white supremacy; to turn a blind eye is a political statement in and of itself. My uncle is just one of many who have been failed by the American rejection of the Other. My uncle's killer did just six years at the California Youth Academy and has never admitted responsibility for what he did. He ran off to the school parking lot, got his knife from his truck, ran back and stabbed my uncle through his rib cage. Once. That was all it took.

It was difficult for my family to abandon everything they knew and settle themselves here in Davis, California. Coworkers, classmates, neighbors, and strangers alike discriminated against them based on their perceived Otherness, so they learned to look down and be quiet. To become invisible in the white man's land. Still, my family found community in the small handful of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants in Davis, and my uncle formed a brotherhood with 3 Vietnamese boys his age. They were harassed by white schoolmates at Davis Senior High School for months leading up to May 4th— shoved, hit with footballs, and treated as foreigners on soil itself colonized from Native tribes. Once, Russell Clark “got mad [when] he couldn't understand what the Vietnamese students were saying,” and a fight broke out. Students circled around, hollering and chanting, but my uncle didn't fight. He was well-trained in martial arts, but didn't believe in violence. He tried to stop the fight when James Pierman, a friend of Russell's, suddenly launched a knife through him. This was the same knife he'd asked a friend in Woodshop to sharpen for him just less than a week prior.

Until she died, grandma was never able to rid herself of the guilt for not saving her son. The son who was shy, but gentle and kind. The one who always woke up early to prepare warm rice for his mother. The one who loved tea. Reading martial arts comic books. I heard once that he had a knack for drawing too.

I do not have and perhaps will never find the right words to honorably capture his memory or the trauma my family endured. After all, this is the story of the uncle I never met.

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I feel no end of sadness and frustration going through the "Stop Asian Hate" hashtag only to see that so many of my community members must prove their own humanity and publicize their own traumas to an audience content with apoliticality and performative action. Values aren't values unless we practice them. Racism is bigger than our egos that tell us that we aren't "bad" people—it is written into our laws, policies, and institutions. Unless we call it for what it is, this country will continue to claim more innocent lives by the day. We cannot divorce this state of anti-Asian hate from America's continued dehumanization and colonization of people from the Asia-Pacific, nor can we divorce it from the oppression of other people of color worldwide, from the streets of Minneapolis to Palestine. No one is born in their homeland wanting to become a refugee; my family had to flee Viet Nam because of the militarism and destruction that America brought upon us, and that view of us as an enemy followed my uncle to death's door.